

# *The Psychology of Belief and Unbelief*

UHON 302-003 | M | 1:00-3:30 | SHC 8 | 41002

Fulfills A&S Group IV: Social and Behavioral Sciences

Harold Delaney

Psychology has long been concerned with beliefs of individuals regarding ultimate concerns such as the purpose of life, or the existence of God. Freud's view of religion as an illusion or projection of one's wishes is perhaps best known. However, other prominent 20th century psychologists, such as Carl Jung and Viktor Frankl, had much more positive views. For example, Frankl suggests that the primary human drive is not, as Freud thought, pleasure but the pursuit of what we find meaningful. The classic treatments of religion of these three thinkers will be juxtaposed with contemporary writings on the psychology of belief and unbelief to set the stage for an examination of debates currently raging. The class will consider current best sellers from atheists, such as Richard Dawkins' *The God Delusion*, and responses from theists. The strength of the arguments advanced will be examined, as well as the psychological factors that may be motivating the views of both theists and atheists.

## **Readings**

Frankl, V., *Man's Search for Meaning*; Freud, S., *The Future of an Illusion*; Jung, C., *Psychology and Religion*; Vitz, P., *Faith of the Fatherless: The Psychology of Atheism*; Dawkins, R., *The God Delusion*; McGrath, A. & J.C., *The Dawkins' Delusion*; D'Souza, D., *What's So Great About Christianity?*; Berlinski, D., *The Devil's Delusion*. The class will also view debates between Richard Dawkins and Alister McGrath, and between Christopher Hitchens and Dinesh D'Souza.

## **Requirements**

Students will be asked to write one- or two-page responses weekly to questions on the readings. In addition, students will be asked to view videos of debates between Dawkins and McGrath, and between D'Souza and Hitchens. A final term paper and an oral presentation based on the term paper research will also be required.

## **About the Instructor**

Psychology professor Harold Delaney has directed the Psychology Honors Program and has been teaching about the history of psychology for 25 years. He has published over 50 professional papers, coauthored a graduate text, and coedited *Judeo-Christian Perspectives on Psychology: Human Nature, Motivation, and Change*, published by the American Psychological Association.

## **About the Student Teacher**

Gaby Chacon is pursuing a degree in biology with a minor in chemistry. She is currently conducting biology research and plans to obtain a Ph.D. in the field after her undergraduate studies. As a student teacher, she is interested in learning about and contributing to others' perspectives regarding this course's open-ended topics. Her hobbies include futbol, tennis, snowboarding, and laughing.